Aureus, et simili frondescit virga metallo.
Ergo alte vestiga oculis, et rite repertum
Carpe manu, namque ipse volens, facilisque sequetur.*

* *Æneid*, VI, 136. *See the translation of the longer inclusive passage on pages* 69 *and* 70, *in Note* 38.

IMagine that you see a lady named Divine Inspiration, saying to the zealous student and virtuous youth what follows.—'Hearken,' she says, 'to what it is meet that you should do before ought else. There is in yonder earthly forest a Golden Bough hidden in a great densely leaved tree. This bough has very soft and pliable leaves and twigs, and is sacred to Juno, the Goddess of that place. It is encompassed by a great number of ancient trees and by shady vales. And know that no man can enter into the secret places of the earth until he shall have plucked the said golden bough. For the beautiful Goddess Proserpine has decreed that it be given her as a present. As soon as you have plucked one, there will spring forth another, of gold and of the same form. Therefore, search well and gaze with all your eyes, & as soon as you have found it, pluck it with your hand; for you will easily obtain it, since it will let itself be pulled from its place, as of its own will and at your pleasure.'

THus this beautiful golden bough, like Homer's golden chain, signifies Learning; & its leaves, which are three-and-twenty in number, are the three-and-twenty letters of the Alphabet. And he who shall succeed in finding it in the great forest of the miseries of this world & in the valleys thereof, he is an Æneas, that is to say, a man of great qualities and worthy of all praise. For Αινειασ† in Greek, means a man worthy of all praise & honour. The reason why I say and quote these fine things in passing is always the better to exalt our well-shaped letters, & the more zealously to urge goodly minds to devote their hearts and their love to the said letters and sciences.

† *From* αἰνέω?

IHave said that this golden bough had three-and-twenty leaves, covertly signifying the three-and-twenty letters of the Alphabet. And should any ask me how I know it, I should say that the noble Poet Virgil so taught me, the while I gazed upon his Æneas, seeking the said golden bough that he might go down into the dark places of profound meditation upon the vices & virtues of this mortal life. And if some noble heart would fain learn by touch and by sight where he may find this number three-and-twenty, let him read in the sixth book of the *Æneid*, where, as I have quoted, Virgil introduces the Sibyl counselling Æneas to seek the golden bough, and he will find that the Poet wittingly and

covertly makes her speak in three-&-twenty verses, of which the first is:

Tros anchisiade facilis descensus auerni.

And, proceeding, the last verse is:—

Vincere nec duro poteris conuellere ferro.

Counting these two & those that are between them, we shall find three-and-twenty verses. And should one reply that these are verses, and not letters, I should say that, for the orderly disposition & description of the thing, he wrote three-&-twenty verses; which number he made to correspond covertly to the three-&-twenty letters of the Alphabet, without which one can acquire neither learning nor perfect virtue. These matters will not be found in the commentaries on the said passage, for the commentators are intent upon following their style as commentators, while I have been intent upon observation of the significance & allegorical meaning of the letters. There are those who say that Virgil meant by this golden branch a branch of mistletoe,* which is almost of the colour of gold, and which has little round white berries like pearls; but, saving their honour, he meant, as I have said, learning, whereof the leaves are letters. If you take away the leaves from a bough, there is no bough left, but a bare limb; so, if you take away letters from learning, there is no learning left, but ignorance. And to place this matter before your eyes, I will draw here a figure and design of each, namely, a bough & a bare limb. But first I will set down the said three-and-twenty verses at length, to the end that students may rejoice for not having to seek them out in Virgil.

* '*Guyst*' = *gui*?

Tros anchisiade facilis descensus auerni,
Noctes atque dies patet atri janua Ditis,
Sed reuocare gradum, superasque euadere ad auras.
Hoc opus, hic labor est. Pauci quos æquus amauit
Juppiter, aut ardens euexit ad æthera virtus
Dijs geniti potuere, tenent media omnia syluæ,
Cocytusque sinu labens circunfluit atro.
Quod si tantus amor menti si tanta cupido est
Bis Stygios innare lacus, bis nigra videre
Tartara, et insano juuat indulgere labori,
Accipe quæ peragenda prius, latet arbore opaca
Aureus et folijs et lento vimine ramus,
Junoni infernæ dictus sacer, hunc tegit omnis